



THE TIME IS NEW

You Will Die at Twenty

+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Amjad Abu Alala

Amjad Abu Alala on ‘You Will Die at Twenty’

What drew you to filmmaking?

I am 37, I am Sudanese with Sudanese nationality, but I was born and raised in Dubai. I spent five years in Sudan when I was a teenager, and my film has a lot to do with this period. There, I fell in love with cinema, watching for the first time a film by the late Egyptian director Youssef Chahine. I began to look for all his films and then for works from other directors. Later on, at the university in Dubai, there was a camera available for the students and I used it for my first short films.

Was shooting this film a way to get back to your Sudanese roots?

Certainly. Being raised in Dubai helped me to understand what a film industry could be and to meet people: I created a production company and I produced some shorts from other directors. Meanwhile, I was always wondering why Sudanese cinema had totally stopped: the older directors were vainly waiting for money government, but as a new generation, we saw new ways.

From 2009, we started to do workshops through the Sudan Film Factory, then in 2014 the first edition of the Sudan Independent Film Festival was held in Khartoum where I enjoy programming a lot. In Sudan, young aspiring filmmakers can only see Arabic or US commercial films: they feel a big gap between what they see and what they want to do. The idea was to open a window, to show another cinema from the world. The government let us proceed: they officially supported the festival, but their way of support was just not forbidding it!

Where does the subject of You Will Die at Twenty come from?

Originally, there is a short story by a very well-known Sudanese writer and activist, Hammour Ziada. He lives in Egypt because he was banned from Sudan for ten years... I read his story in 2016 and immediately I knew it would inspire my first feature. This story connected me deeply with my own childhood: I am quite a joyful guy, I love life, I talk too much, I drink, I love to party, etc. But there is always something about death in my mind. When I was a kid in Sudan, I lost my best friend, then three months later one of my aunts. Those two deaths struck me. I became a very quiet kid, stopped talking for weeks; then talked again, but very little until I went to university and discovered theatre and cinema. Then I talked again a lot – and haven’t stopped since!

Would you say that this story is a fable about what prevents people to really live their lives?

The film addresses how much a strong ideology can really affect people’s lives, and the way it sometimes has been used politically. The Sudanese government of Omar el-Beshir used Islam to shut everyone’s mouth – when you say ‘God says,’ nobody talks any more.

My film is an invitation for freedom. Nothing and no one can ever tell you: this is your destiny, it is written somewhere. You have to decide yourself what will be your life. That is what Suleiman tries to teach Muzamil.

Suleiman says you have to experience sin to pick the right way...

Why say 'sorry' before making the mistake? Go make the mistake and then be sorry. Suleiman wants Muzamil to live his life: a life full of good and bad, where nobody tells you what is the right way. You have to experience life to know who you are.

Is the story set in today's Sudan? Is the village realistic?

We shot in my dad's village, where we used to go on vacation. And apart from changing some colours here and there, we did not build anything, this is the village as it is. The short story was set where Hammour Ziada was raised, in the north of the country, close to Egypt. I told him I wanted to bring it to my place, central Sudan. It was even truer because Sufiism, this kind of mystic Islam, opposed to Salafism, is very strong in this region: the ceremony where the dervish collapses is Sufiism. The village is three hours south of Khartoum, it is the part of the country between the two Niles: the Blue Nile, which we see in the film, and the White Nile, the both meeting in Khartoum to give birth to the large Nile.

Where do the images Suleiman shows to Muzamil come from?

Those clips of Sudan before the Islamic regime come from a documentary called *Khartoum*, made by a very well-known director, Jadallah Jubarra, who died in 2008. I wanted to send my regards to him. We see people dancing in Khartoum... People were free before 1989, when the Islamic government closed every bar, then shut down the national cinema institution... The religion card was played, and Sudan became a dark spot for 30 years.

Last spring, Sudan finally got rid of Omar el-Beshir, who ran the country since the 1989 coup. Is the film a message to Sudanese people, a call for freedom?

I wrote the film before the revolution, but freedom was always my subject. We started shooting in mid-December, on the same day when the first spark of revolution started in the very north of Sudan, in Atbara. Everyone on the set was so excited. Even the foreigners, and especially the French people, were passionate. The smell of freedom was all over our set.

In April, I left post-production in Cairo to get back to Sudan to be part of the events. I spent two months there. I was in Khartoum on 6 April, when the giant sit-in began, brutally ended by the military forces a few weeks later. Most of my crew were there and they got beaten very badly and I even lost a friend among the victims.

Of course, all this affected the film. One example: the first time Muzamil goes to Suleiman's house, he listens to a song. I had thought of playing this French song by Charles Aznavour, 'La Bohème'. But instead I chose a song by Muhammad Wardi, which was the anthem of the revolution of 1983 and which you could hear everywhere in Khartoum this April. Wardi was a communist singer very well known in Africa, who got banished from Sudan. The words go something like 'We are all inspired by revolution... and we will get what we deserve.'

Tell us about your actors and crew...

There is no cinema industry in Sudan, therefore almost no cinema actors. But I only needed professional actors for the Sakina and Suleiman parts.

For Muzamil, I met 150 boys, and at the end of the second day, Mustafa appeared...

I gathered an international crew. But if the heads of departments were foreigners, their assistants were Sudanese: I wanted Sudanese technicians to learn how a film is made. I deeply wish the rebirth of a Sudanese film industry. My film is only the eighth feature fiction film ever produced in Sudan!

Production notes

YOU WILL DIE AT TWENTY (SATAMOTO FEL ESHREEN)

Director: Amjad Abu Alala
Production Companies: Andolfi, Transit Films, Duofilm, Die Gesellschaft DGS
In co-production with: Station Films, Film Clinic
With the support of: Aide aux Cinémas du Monde of the CNC, Institut Français, Doha Film Institute, Sørfond+, Creative Europe Media, Arri International Support Program, Berlinale World Cinema Fund, Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, Sudan Film Factory, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture
In co-production with: Canal+ International, Sunnyland Film as a member of ART group, The Cell Post Production
Producers: Arnaud Dommerc, Hossam Elouan, Ingrid Lill Høgtun, Michael Henrichs
Co-producers: Amjad Abu Alala, Mohammed Alomda, Linda Bolstad Strønen, Marie Fuglestein Lægreid, Mohamed Hefzy
Screenplay: Yousef Ibrahim, Amjad Abu Alala
Director of Photography: Sébastien Goepfert
Editor: Heba Othman

Colourist: Brice Pancot
Original Music: Amine Bouhafa
Sound Designer: Rana Eid
Sound Mixer: Rawad Hobeika
Re-Recording Mixer: Florent Lavallée

Cast
Mustafa Shehata (Muzamil)
Islam Mubarak (Sakina)
Mahmoud Elsaraj (Sulaiman)
Bunna Khalid (Naima)
Talal Afifi (Alnoor)
Amal Mustafa (Set Alnesea)
Moatasem Rashid (young Muzamil)
Asjad Mohamed (young Naima)

Sudan/Egypt/Qatar/Germany/Norway/France 2019
103 mins

THE TIME IS NEW:
SELECTIONS FROM CONTEMPORARY ARAB CINEMA

The Man Who Sold His Skin (L’Homme qui a vendu sa peau)
Sat 4 Sep 17:40 (+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Kaouther Ben Hania);
Thu 16 Sep 20:50
200 Meters
Tue 7 Sep 20:50; Wed 15 Sep 18:10
As Above, So Below (Kama fissamaa’, kathalika ala al-ard)
Wed 8 Sep 20:45; Fri 1 Oct 18:10 (+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Sarah Francis)
143 Sahara Street (143 rue du désert)
Sat 11 Sep 11:30; Mon 20 Sep 18:15
It Must Be Heaven
Sat 11 Sep 20:40; Mon 27 Sep 18:00; Mon 4 Oct 14:30
Let’s Talk Ehkeely
Mon 13 Sep 18:00 (+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Marianne Khoury);
Tue 5 Oct 20:50
Tlameess
Tue 14 Sep 20:40; Thu 30 Sep 18:00
Talking About Trees
Mon 20 Sep 14:30; Mon 27 Sep 20:45; Sun 3 Oct 18:00
You Will Die at Twenty (Satamoto fel eshreen)
Thu 23 Sep 20:30 (+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Amjad Abu Alala);
Sat 2 Oct 14:20

Narrative Encounters: Shorts Programme
Fri 24 Sep 20:40; Tue 5 Oct 18:10
Adam
Sat 25 Sep 14:20; Mon 4 Oct 20:50
Abou Leila
Sun 26 Sep 18:00; Sat 2 Oct 20:30

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